

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 17, 2003

The Honorable Christopher Cox
Chairman
Select Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing to request that the Committee hold an immediate hearing to investigate the nature and adequacy of current airline security measures in light of press reports indicating that suspicious bags were found yesterday in the bathrooms of two Southwest Airlines flights.

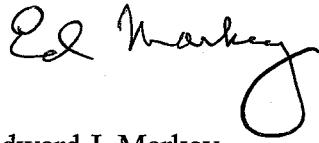
As you know, Southwest Airlines has reported that the bags were found Thursday night in a lavatory compartment after the planes landed in Houston, Texas, and New Orleans, Louisiana. The items were reportedly inside a small plastic bag and included a small number of box cutters and other items intended to simulate a threat. Notes in each package reportedly indicated the items were intended to challenge the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) checkpoint security procedures.

This incident raises disturbing questions about the nature and adequacy of current airline security measures, and comes just after other press reports indicating that five federal agents posing as passengers succeeded in sneaking weapons and other prohibited items through security checkpoints at Logan International Airport last week. These reports indicate that the agents, posing as airline passengers, were able to bring knives, a bomb, and a gun in carry-on baggage through several checkpoints at different terminals at Logan without being stopped. Press articles indicated that this security test was part of a federal investigation at about 15 major airports around the country and that security at Logan had proven to be "no better or worse" than at other airports.

These reports suggest that we continue to face very serious vulnerabilities at our nation's airports. I believe that the Committee needs to hold immediate hearings to investigate whether the Homeland Security Department and its Transportation Security Administration are doing everything that needs to be done to make airtravel in our country safe. Such hearings should include an examination of the Southwest Airlines incidents, the Logan situation (as well as any similar penetrations of airport security elsewhere around the country), and a full inquiry into what measures are being undertaken to secure air cargo traveling on passenger airlines from terrorist exploitation.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I look forward to working with you to ensure that our airports and commercial aircraft are secure from the threat of another September 11th attack.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Ed Markey". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Edward J. Markey

Cc: The Honorable Jim Turner